

Message Text

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ACTION SS-30

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AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY SAIGON PRIORITY

CINCPAC PRIORITY

COMUSSAG PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 PHNOM PENH 5682

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS

TAGS: MILI, CB

SUBJECT: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DEFEAT AT KOMPONG LUONG

1. SUMMARY. THE ENEMY'S ELIMINATION OF THE KOMPONG LUONG BEACHHEAD 30 KMS NORTH OF PHNOM PENH IS A SECOND UNHAPPY CHAPTER IN THE BATTLE FOR THE HISTORICAL TOWN OF OUDONG. ALTHOUGH NOT A DISASTER IN ITSELF (THE LOSSES IN MEN AND EQUIPMENT AT KOMPONG LUONG MAY NOT EXCEED WHAT FANK WOULD HAVE LOST HAD IT BEEN ABLE TO CARRY THROUGH WITH ITS PLANS TO EXTRACT SOME OF THE UNITS BY RIVER), THE DEFEAT MAGNIFIES THE DIFFICULTY OF KEEPING A RIVER SUPPLY CORRIDOR OPEN TO THE PRODUCTIVE GREAT LAKE PROVINCES AND ADDS VALUABLE PSYCHOLOGICAL MOMENTUM TO THE NEW PROVINCIAL PHASE OF THE ENEMY'S DRY SEASON OFFENSIVE. THE LESSONS FOR FANK ARE CLEAR: IF THE GKR FEELS IT ESSENTIAL TO TAKE ON THE ENEMY AT PROVINCIAL POINTS OF THE LATTER'S CHOSSING, THEY MUST ENSURE CLEARER COMMAND ARRANGEMENTS, EXECUTE THEIR PLANS QUICKLY AND/OR WITHDRAW, OR THEY WILL LOSE THE WAR OF ATTRITION THAT THE ENEMY'S PROVINCIAL STRATEGY HAS INITIATED. WE HAVE EMPHASIZED THIS MESSAGE TO FANK'S GENERAL STAFF AND WE PLAN TO TAKE IT ALSO TO

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PRESIDENT LON NOL. END SUMMARY.

2. FANK'S PRIOR PLANS: THE KOMPONG LUONG BEACHHEAD, WHICH JUST PRIOR TO ITS ELIMINATION CONTAINED TWO BRIGADES, ONE INDEPENDENT BATTALION, TWO ENGINEER COMPANIES, AN ARMORED CALVARY SQUADRON AND A FEW SMALLER UNITS, WAS ORIGINALLY ESTABLISHED TO RELIEVE AND, WHEN IT FELL, RETAKE THE FORMER ROYAL CAPITAL OF OUDONG, THE LOSS OF WHICH WAS OF POLITICAL IMPORTANCE TO THE GKR. THE OPERATION WAS CONCEIVED AND CLOSELY FOLLOWED BY MARSHAL LON NOL WHO ALLEGEDLY WAS UNDER CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE FROM THE BUDDHIST CLERGY TO RETAKE OUDONG. SUCCESSFUL BUT COSTLY NAVAL OPERATIONS WERE REQUIRED TO ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN THE BEACHHEAD. WHEN AFTER FOUR WEEKS NO PROGRESS WAS REGISTERED TOWARD THIS OBJECTIVE, FANK BEGAN TO CONSTRUCT DEFENSIVE FORTIFICATIONS FOR A SMALL FORCE TO RETAIN THE RIVER BANK, PLANNING TO EXTRACT ONE BRIGADE BY RIVER TO REJOIN THE BADLY DEPLETED PHNOM PENH RESERVES AND TO SEND THE OTHER TO LINK UP WITH OTHER FANK FORCES AT LOVEK, EIGHT KMS. TO THE NORTHWEST. NONE OF FANK'S PLANS WERE EXECUTED.

3. THE ENEMY'S OPERATION: BEGINNING IN THE EVENING OF SATURDAY APRIL 20 ENEMY UNITS OF UNKNOWN STRENGTH BEGAN INFILTRATING SOUTHWARD DOWN THE TONLE SAP RIVER BANK, WHICH WAS APPARENTLY LIGHTLY DEFENDED BY TWO ENGINEER COMPANIES AND ELEMENTS OF AN INFANTRY BATTALION. BY EARLY SUNDAY MORNING APRIL 21 THEY HAD ISOLATED THE TROOPS IN THE BRIDGEHEAD FROM THE RIVER. DESPITE HEAVY KAF AIR ATTACKS ON THE ENEMY-HELD RIVER BANK, THE INFILTRATORS SUCCEEDED IN PLACING ROUNDS ON AT LEAST ONE 105MM ARTILLERY POSITION AND ON THE COMMAND POST. EARLY IN THE AFTERNOON THE 80TH BRIGADE EVACUATED TO THE NORTHWEST, ENCOUNTERING LIMITED ENEMY FORCES. IT WAS LATER FOLLOWED BY THE 39TH BRIGADE AND OTHER FANK ELEMENTS. IRONICALLY, BEACHHEAD FORCES, WHICH HAD BEEN UNABLE TO MAKE ANY SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS TOWARD LOVEK DURING THE PREVIOUS TEN DAYS, SUCCEEDED UNDER ENEMY STIMULUS IN LINKING UP WITH LOVEK GARRISON IN 45 MINUTES.

4. FANK LOSSES:

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A. CONSIDERING THE SUCCESS OF THE ENEMY MANEUVER IN RAPIDLY FORCING FANK FORCES TO ABANDON THEIR POSITIONS, PERSONNEL LOSSES WERE NOT AS GREAT AS MIGHT BE EXPECTED. OF 663 MEN IN THE 80TH BRIGADE, 563 (42 WOUNDED) HAD REACHED LOVEK BY MARCH 22, AND 317 (60 WOUNDED) OF THE 39TH BRIGADE'S 600 MEN WERE COUNTED SAFE. THE ENGINEER COMPANIES MANAGED TO EXTRACT SOME 50 OF THEIR

200 MEN. EIGHTY-SEVEN MEN OF THE VERY LOW STRENGTH 230TH BATTALION OF THE 27TH BRIGADE REACHED LOVEK. THE TOTAL OF MEN UNACCOUNTED FOR THUS NEW APPEARS TO BE ABOUT 600 AND OTHER STRAGGLER JLKT COME IN. IT IS NOW CLEAR THAT THE FORCES IN THE BRIDGEHEAD NUMBERED MUCH LESS THAN REPORTED.

B. EQUIPMENT LOSSES WERE, OF COURSE, SUBSTANTIAL. FOUR 105'S WERE ABANDONED. TWO OF THESE WERE REPORTEDLY DESTROYED BY THEIR DEPARTING CREWS, ONE WAS DAMAGED BY AIR AND ONE MAY HAVE FALLEN TO THE ENEMY IN OPERABLE CONDITION.

MOST OTHER CREW SERVED WEAPONS IN THE BEACHHEAD MAY HAVE BEEN CAPTURED. OF 14 OPERABLE ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIERS IN THE BEACHHEAD, 12 REACHED LOVEK AND THE TWO REMAINING WERE INOPERABLE. A MARK 108 RADIO WAS DESTROYED BEFORE BEING ABANDONED. ONE BULLDOZER, ONE POL TRUCK AND SEVERAL OTHER PIECES OF ENGINEERING EQUIPMENT WERE LOST. THE ENEMY ALSO WAS LEFT THREE INOPERABLE MNK RIVER CRAFT, ONE OF WHICH WAS SUNK NEAR THE SHORE, AND THE OTHER TWO BEACHED AND SUBSEQUENTLY BOMBED BY KAF. SIGNIFICANTLY, THESE LOSSES BRING TOTAL MNK CRAFT DESTROYED IN OPERATIONS TO SUPPORT KOMPONG LUONG TO 6, OR THE EQUIVALENT OF ALL VESSELS LOST PREVIOUSLY IN THE WAR.

C. WE DO NOT KNOW THE QUANTITY OF AMMUNITION LEFT BEHIND AT KOMPONG LUONG BUT BELIEVE IT WAS SUBSTANTIAL. C-130 FLIGHTS DROPPED 96 SHORT TONS OR 15 DAYS SUPPLY ON APRIL 14, 15 AND 16, AND KAF MADE A FEW SMALLER DROPS. OVER HALF OF THIS AMOUNT MAY HAVE BEEN ON HAND ON APRIL 20, BUT SOME OF THESE STORES WERE DESTROYED BY HEAVY KAF AIR STRIKES

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WHICH CAUSED SEVERAL SECONDARY EXPLOSIONS ON APRIL 21 AND 22. ALL 105MM AMMUNITION WAS REPORTEDLY CONSUMED BEFORE THE EVACUATION.

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ACTION SS-30

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EXDIS

5. THE CONSEQUENCES:

A. THE KOMPONG LUONG EVENTS CONSTITUTE THE SECOND AND PERHAPS NOT THE LAST CHAPTER OF THE BATTLE FOR THE PSYCHOLOGICALLY IMPORTANT BUT MILITARILY INSIGNIFICANT TOWN OF OUDONG. THIS VICTORY, THE SECOND TIME THE ENEMY HAS STRUCK PAY DIRT SINCE SHIFTING ITS FOCUS FROM PHNOM PENH, WILL GIVE MILITARY IMPETUS TO ENEMY EFFORTS IN THE ROUTE 5-TONLE SAP AREA AND ADD TO THE PSYCHOLOGICAL MOMENTUM OF ITS NEW, NATIONWIDE PROVINCIAL STRATEGY.

B. WHILE FANK CAN ILL-AFFORD PERSONNEL LOSSES OF ANY MAGNITUDE, THE DEFEAT AT KOMPONG LUONG MAY PROVE LEAST COSTLY IN THIS ASPECT AND MIGHT EVEN BE SAID TO HAVE ACCOMPLISHED THE FANK OBJECTIVE OF EXTRACTING THE 80TH BRIGADE. THE 80TH BRIGADE IS, HOWEVER, STILL ISOLATED AT THE LARGER ENCLAVE OF LOVEK, WHICH WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BECOME AN EARLY ENEMY TARGET, AND IS THUS NOT AVAILABLE TO THE GENERAL RESERVE. THE LOSSES IN EQUIPMENT WERE COSTLY, IN PARTICULAR THOSE DEALT THROUGH-OUT THE LIFETIME OF THE BEACHHEAD TO THE NAVY, WHICH

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WILL NOW BE HAND TAXED NOT ONLY TO VIE FOR THE TONLE SAP BUT TO CONTINUE TO PROVIDE THE EXCELLENT PROTECTION IT HAS BEEN GIVEN MEKONG CONVOYS.

C. THE LOSS OF KOMPONG LUONG BRINGS THE CIVILIAN ECONOMY ONE STEP CLOSER TO THE SUPPLY CRISIS WHICH

WOULD ENSUE FROM ENEMY INTERDICTION OF THE TONLE SAP RIVER. WITH CHANCES OF REOPENING ROUTE 5 IN A REASONABLE TIME FRAME VIRTUALLY NIL, TONLE SAP CONVOYS PROVIDE THE ONLY ECONOMICAL MEANS OF SUPPLYING PHNOM PENH WITH THE BULK OF ITS CONSUMABLES FROM THE PRODUCTIVE PROVINCES OF KOMPONG CHHNANG, PURSAT AND BATTAMBANG. PREVIOUS TO THE FALL OF KOMPONG LUONG ENEMY FIRE FROM BOTH BANKS AND RECENTLY CONSTRUCTED BARRIERS ACROSS THE RIVER HAD MADE THE EXFAQ#

PITYNQAXETYDUN#

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AWRK# FROM SLIGHTLY NORTH OF PHNOM PENH TO KOMPONG LUONG, WE CAN EXPECT HIM TO INTENSIFY ACTIVITIES ON THE TONLE SAP RIVER NORTH OF KOMPONG LUONG TO THE LAKE REGION.

6. THE LESSONS:

A. THE FANK DECISION TO ESTABLISH A BEACHHEAD AT KOMPONG LUONG WAS, OF COURSE, ASSAILABLE FROM THE BEGINNING FROM A MILITARY VIEWPOINT IN THAT IT DISPERSED FRIENDLY FORCES, CREATED LONG AND DIFFICULTY SUPPLY LINES, AND OPENED UP SOFT SPOTS TO ENEMY ATTACK. THE POLITICAL STAKES, WHICH WERE THE REASONS QUOTED BY LON NOL FOR THE OPERATION, WERE IMPORTANT, BUT THEY ALSO HAVE NOW BEEN LOST. THESE POLITICAL AND MILITARY COSTS MUST LEAD THE KHMER LEADERSHIP IN THE FUTURE TO WEIGH MORE CAREFULLY THE CONSEQUENCES OF PROTECTING PROVINCIAL TARGETS OF THE ENEMY'S CHOOSING.

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B. ONCE HAVING ACCEPTED THE ENEMY'S CHALLENGE IN THE OUDONG AREA AND HAVING MOVED ENERGETICALLY TO ESTABLISH THE BEACHHEAD, FANK FORCES QUICKLY LOST MOMENTUM, ENDING IN A STATE OF PASSIVE WAITING WHICH LEFT ALL INITIATIVE TO THE ENEMY. ALTHOUGH PROBABLY SUPERIOR IN NUMBER TO THE ENEMY, THE FRIENDLY BRIDGEHEAD FORCES WERE UNABLE TO ATTACK OUDONG, LINK UP WITH LOVEK OR, UNTIL ATTACKED FROM THE REAR, EXTRACT THEMSELVES. HENCE-FORTH, SUCH OPERATIONS MUST BE PLANNED AND EXECUTED SO AS TO MOVE IN AND OUT IN A RAPID TIME FRAME EVEN IF THE PRIMARY OBJECTIVE IS NOT OBTAINED. FANK MUST MAINTAIN OVERALL MOBILITY IF THEY ARE TO OPPOSE EFFECTIVELY ENEMY INITIATIVES UNDER THE NEW PROVINCIAL STRATEGY.

C. ALTHOUGH LEADERSHIP FAILURES FROM THE PLATOON UP LIE BEHIND THE KOMPONG LUONG DEFEAT, SHIFTING AND UNCLEAR COMMAND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE FIELD COMMANDERS WERE A DEFICIENCY FANK NEED NOT HAVE INCURRED. THESE CAME IN PART FROM THE FAMILIAR PERSONAL INTERVENTION OF THE MARSHAL HIMSELF, FROM SOME UNAVOIDABLE IF UNFORTUNATELY TIMED REASSIGNMENTS INDEPENDENT OF THE KOMPONG LUONG OPERATION, GIVING THE KOMPONG LUONG AND LOVEK COMMANDS TO UNEMPLOYED AND DISCREDITED GENERALS (SREY YAR AND TUM YAM), FROM THE PREOCCUPATION OF THE TOP FANK STAFF WITH OTHER PROBLEMS, BUT PRINCIPALLY FROM THE FAILURE TO DEFINE INITIALLY THE SCOPE, DURATION AND SIZE OF THE OPERATION SO THAT A PROPER COMMANDER COULD BE DEFINITELY DESIGNATED AND ADEQUATELY TASKED.

7. SINCE OUDONG AND KOMPONG LUONG COMPRIZE, ALONG WITH KAMPOT, ONLY THE FIRST IN WHAT WE BELIEVE WILL BE A SERIES OF ENEMY CHALLENGES IN THE PROVINCES, WE ARE MAKING CERTAIN THAT THESE LESSONS ARE BROUGHT HOME TO THE KHMER. GENERAL PALMER HAS, OF COURSE, SPOKEN TO FANK COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF LTC SOSTHENE FERNANDEZ AND OTHER KEY HEADQUARTERS PERSONNEL ABOUT THESE AND OTHER DEFICIENCIES FREQUENTLY AND WILL CONTINUE TO EMPHASIZE THEM IN THE DAYS TO COME. DURING MY TRIP TO PREY VENG TODAY (APRIL 22), I REVIEWED PAST FAILURES IN TALKS WITH BG NOP PARAMOUN AND HIS STAFF,

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WHO ARE PREPARING TO MEET THE NEXT EXPECTED MAJOR ENEMY INITIATIVE IN THE PROVINCES. WE ARE REQUESTING AN APPOINTMENT WITH MARSHAL LON NOL FOR APRIL 23 TO GIVE HIM OUR ASSESSMENT OF WHAT WENT WRONG AT KOMPONG LUONG, FIND OUT WHAT HE HAS IN MIND FOR AN EFFECTIVE DEFENSE OF LOVEK AND THE NEARBY DENSELY POPULATED AREA OF SALA LEK PRAM, AND ENGAGE IN A FRANK TALK ON THE NEED TO AVOID FUTURE SETBACKS OF THIS NATURE.

DEAN

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